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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated a career education program for 141 ninth grade students at Kemper County High School in rural Mississippi in an effort to reduce the dropout rate and increase career awareness. A mental health counselor gave students monthly instruction on career issues necessary for vocational life after high school graduation. A local community health center was asked to counsel any students demonstrating emotional problems. A questionnaire was administered to students before initiation of the program and upon completion of the program. Topics discussed during the 9-month career education module were: (1) the importance of career education; (2) positive grooming habits, good health habits, appropriate dress, and self-confidence; (3) communication skills; (4) basic social skills: (5) positive self-esteem and self-concept; (6) practicing good work habits; (7) responsibility for self, problem-solving techniques, and managing personal responsibilities; (8) teamwork; and (9) career alternatives. A significant difference was found between responses to the initial questionnaire and to the concluding questionnaire, using the dependent t-test. The results should be replicated using a control group. The appendix contains a copy of the questionnaire and a table of F values of questions in the questionnaire. (Contains 27 references.) (KS)

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Effects of Career Education on 9th Graders in Rural Mississippi

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Effects of Career Education on the 9th Graders in Rural Mississippi

Introduction

Mississippi's dropout rate is the second highest in the nation. With dropping out of school, young people have difficulty seeking employment to sustain them above the poverty level, leading to a life sustained by welfare or criminal behavior.

Rural Mississippi lends itself to high-risk behaviors, (i.e. school drop out, drugs and alcohol, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and severe emotional problems). Without proper skills to motivate the young person to graduate and secure career opportunities, the "cycle" will continue, placing the young adult in a self-defeating mode. The purpose of this study was to introduce career education to one 9th grade population in rural Mississippi to assist in decreasing the drop-out rate and increasing career awareness.

Relevant Literature Review

During the mid-to-late seventies, research on career education was intense. Federal projects to stimulate programs were implemented. Before, the merits of career education were conceptual conjectures with little or no empirical evidence of its effect on students.

During the 1980s three basic purposes of the career education movement were identified: (a) to provide students

with a set of 10 general skills for adjusting to the changes in the 1990s, (b) to make career education a joint effort with the community, rather than an effort of the educational system alone; and (c) to change the educational system by inserting a "careers" emphasis throughout the curriculum. The first purpose included 10 significant survival skills that have been thought to be necessary for survival in the world of work (Hoyt, 1980).

Interventions were developed to enhance the 10 significant survival skills developed by Hoyt. The effects of these interventions were to promote:

1. Competence in the basic academic skills (math and reading achievement) required for adaptability in our rapidly changing society
2. Equipping the student with good work habits (attitudes toward school)
3. Equipping with a set of work values that foster a desire to work
4. Equipping with career decision-making skills, job-hunting skills, and job-getting skills
5. Equipping with job-specific occupational skills and interpersonal skills
6. Equipping with self-understanding and understanding of educational-vocational opportunities
7. Awareness of the means available for continuing and recurrent education

8. Placement or actively seeking placement in a paid occupation in further education, or in a vocation consistent with current career decisions
9. Actively seeking to find meaning and meaningfulness through work and in productive use of leisure time
10. Awareness of the means available for changing career options and of societal and personal constraints impinging on career alternatives (Evans & Burck, 1992, p. 63).

The ninth grade is difficult for most students and can be catastrophic for students who are at risk for drop-out. The initial admission to high school can be devastating for many. Academics are taken seriously. The course load is heavy with required subjects and without earning specific credits, promotion may not be forthcoming.

The difficulty increases when the 9th grade is part of school districts where they are the youngest in a four year institution. The older students can intimidate, tease, offer temptations (e.g. drugs and alcohol), dangers of gangs and sexual activity (Kato, 1986). The risk factors for dropout from high school come in different forms. Usually, they include (a) low attendance, (b) discipline, and (c) academic problems. Students who do not leave school in the early years of high school can be predicted. The usually demonstrates high absenteeism during the first term

of high school and failing all or nearly all of the course work required for the 9th Grade (Azumi & Georgey, 1985).

Today, the at-risk students are being viewed in a new perspective. Thirty-five years ago, at-risk was considered the result of only a single factor, "cultural deprivation." Two other factors were also associated with at-risk, they were: "educational deprivation and failure of all social institutions" (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1988).

Communication, mathematics, and science skills have been identified as the three basic academic skills required of high school graduates (Barton & Kirsch, 1990). Initial entry into the job market is contingent upon having a fourth set of skills. These are the career/vocational skills necessary to perform a certain occupation. According to many employers, employable skills are the number one criteria to keep a job (Lankard, 1987).

Our changing world has created a shrinking labor pool of applicants with minimum job competencies. From job applications, employers must select for hire those who have the potential for meeting the job demands. The job market today requires workers to have broader ranges of competencies. These competencies may be job specific but also include the kinds of management and organizational skills previously required only of supervisors (Izzo & Lankard, 1987).

The U.S. Department of Labor projects by the year 2000, 75 percent of the entering labor force will be women and minorities (Gainer, 1988). To facilitate job achievement, employers, educators, co-workers must be supportive and attempt to understand the diverse attitudes, behaviors, and habits common to people of various cultures. Good interpersonal skills are crucial to such efforts.

There are numerous listings of different skills necessary for the job market. Most of them enter under personal image, habits, attitudes, and behaviors; techniques of communication, problem solving, and decision making; and management and organizational processes. Gainer (1988) groups such skills into four groups:

1. Group and Organizational Effectiveness Skills: interpersonal skills, organizational skills, and skills in negotiation, creativity, and leadership

2. Individual Competence: communication skills, comprehension, computation and culture

3. Personal Reliability Skills: personal management, ethics and vocational maturity

4. Economic Adaptability Skills: problem solving, learning employability, and career development.

Some of these skills are evident to employers as early as the initial interview. Applicants who demonstrate negative behaviors (language, appearance, mannerisms, and especially attitude) receive lower assessments than those

without negative behaviors (Barton & Kirsch, 1990). According to several reports, bad attitudes had the greatest negative effect on employers' decisions to hire. Only 11.1 percent of the machine trade, clerical and retail employers would hire an applicant with a bad attitude, irrespective of the applicant's education and training record (Lankard & Miguel, 1987).

Barton and Kirsch (1990) sponsored a survey by the National Association of Manufacturers and found employers want schools to take more responsibility for students' employability skill development. Employers stated they wanted schools to teach both general and specific employability skills, including attendance, punctuality, and good work attitudes. The attitudes and concerns of employers in this study and similar studies remain consistent--employability skills are important on the job and must be taught in the schools.

Bishop and Lankard (1987) believe the best results for teaching employability skills is to integrate academic and vocational skill training. They developed a set of strategies for incorporating employability skill development in the classroom.

1. Demand Good Deportment in the Classroom. Initiate strict guidelines for tardiness, class cutting, and discipline.

2. Express Work Values through Classroom Instruction. Promote and require timeliness, effort, responsibility, and other values. Over 65 percent of employers have been effected by employees who did not try.

3. Encourage Self-Esteem in Students. Expect the best from students. Attitudes about self are reflected in applicants' nonverbal behaviors--a factor influencing employer assessments.

4. Promote and Display a Positive Attitude in the Classroom. Attitude is an important part of a person's employability rating and can be improved with practice and effort.

5. Use of Instructional Materials that Illustrate the Importance of Employability Skills Development. Izzo and Lankard (1987) provide examples of how having (or lacking) employability skills affects a person's ability to find, get, and keep a job.

Consider the at-risk student and the lack of career education and the outcome they provide for suitable employment. Today, our present system of formal education is doing a poor job of integrating academics and vocational training, especially with students who are at risk for school failure and vocational failure.

Statement of the Problem

Rural Mississippi has two distinct characteristics. First the high prevalence of at-risk youth and the lack of

vocational opportunities. Combine these factors and the potential for failure becomes a suitable likelihood for breakdown of positive growth and development. This problem is evident across Mississippi.

The lack of career education indicated a need by the Cooperative Extension Office at Mississippi State University to submit a proposal for a grant to promote career education and mental health in two rural counties in Mississippi. The two counties were identified and 7th graders in one counties and all 9th graders in the other county were selected for the study supported by a federal grant.

Weems Community Mental Health Center was invited to assist Kemper County School district in presenting a career education program to all 119 9th graders at Kemper County High School during the 1991-92 school year. Community Counseling Services were invited to demonstrate the career education to 7th graders in Noxubee County.

Limitations

There were several limitations to be considered in this study:

1. Maturation occurred during the nine months of the study.

2. Only one school district was used.

3. No control school was used in the experiment.

4. History may have occurred due to the students' greater knowledge and media coverage of certain events.

5. Differential selection of subjects. The range of age from 14 to 20 could easily influence the outcome of the study.

6. As with any self-report measure, the results are limited to the degree that the answers to the items on the questionnaire were honest and correct expression of the respondents' perceptions.

Objectives of the Study

The study defined several objectives that could lead to positive career alternatives for rural Mississippi youth.

1. The career unit would be taught to all 9th grade student in Kemper County.

2. A preexperiment and post experimental questionnaire would be given to all 9th graders (See Appendix A).

3. The demographics would be evaluated as to their role in the study.

Methodology

Subjects. This study was limited to all the 141 9th grade students at Kemper County High School for the 1991-92 school year. Demographics are: (a) average age 15 years seven months (b) 109 students were Black, three students were American Indian, and 29 students were white, and (c) 72 students were female and 69 students were male. Special education students were not used in the study.

The students were introduced to the program during the first week of the school year. Then on the first Tuesday of each month, the mental health counselor instructed the students on issues relating to career counseling.

Permission to conduct the program was obtained through the school district. The instruction related to career issues necessary for vocational life after high school graduation with self-esteem issues and the importance of maintaining self academically. Weems Community Health Center was also requested to counsel with any students demonstrating emotional problems whether behavioral or affective. The same mental health counselor was used throughout the year. The social studies teacher was the coordinator for the classes and stayed in the classroom during each of the teaching units.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was developed according to the instructions from the Home Extension Office at Mississippi State University and to meet the requirements of the grant. Initially, the Myers-Briggs Inventory was to be the instrument of choice. However, expense overrode the use of the instrument and a new instrument was developed.

Validity and reliability were established before use of the instrument on the students. Test-retest reliability yielded a high correlation, $r = .8132$. Internal consistency was moderate, = .6437; split-half $r = .5873$.

Data Collection

On the first day of the career education unit (September, 1991), the questionnaire was administered to the students. There was no career instruction given before its administration. The questionnaires were collected as soon as they were completed and stored until the end of the school year.

The topics discussed during the nine month period of the career education module were:

1. Introduction to career education, what it could do for the student.

2. Positive grooming habits, good health habits, appropriate dress, and self-confidence.

3. Communication skills

4. Basic social skills

5. Positive self-esteem and self-concept

6. Practicing good work habits (attendance at school, etc.)

7. Responsibility for self, problem-solving techniques, and managing personal responsibilities

8. Teamwork. Cooperation with peers, how to work as a member of a team, and work under supervision.

9. Career alternatives,as a drop-out and as a high school education.

The questionnaire was again administered to the 9th grade students on the completion of the career education unit.

Results

Data were compared between the initial questionnaire and the concluding questionnaire using a dependent *t*-test. A significant difference ($t = 4.82$, $p < .05$) between the questionnaires was noted. Data were also compared between individual questions on the questionnaire using the dependent *t*-test. Significant differences were noted on questions 3,6,10, 17,19, 25, and 28 and reported in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Demographics were analyzed using analysis of variance. Sex and age demonstrated no significant differences on the answers to the questions, but race (F probability of .031) did illustrate a significant difference between the questionnaires at the alpha level of .05.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Previous reports demonstrate the value of career education and the need to assist at-risk students. There were few findings in the literature discussing the possibility of a correlation between at-risk and vocational needs. Therefore the need to intertwine the two in a longitudinal study appears to be imperative. The report from this study is the beginning of a longitudinal study in

Kemper County High School to establish the importance of career education and its correlation with school drop-out rate.

The study was limited to one school district, a control group was unable to be used during the initial phase of the experiment. It is to the advantage of the research to obtain another school district for the control group that is also in a rural disadvantaged area. Therefore, the results of this study need to be interpreted with caution. Including a control group the investigator could study change and allow for control of extraneous variables that pose a threat to internal validity.

The significant different between the questionnaires demonstrates something occurred, but at this stage, we are unable to determine precisely what made the difference. The possibility of factor analyzing the questions for potential factors may be a possibility for the second year of the study. Also the use of discriminant analyze to separate the factors into different groups could be of value.

Questions 3, 6, 10, 17, 19, 25, and 28 need to be investigated as to their significant difference in responses to the questionnaire. The possibility of administering a questionnaire using these questions could abbreviate the questionnaire for the 9th grade students, making it easier to administer.

Due to economic and vocational problems now occurring in the United States , education and career education are in the forefront and the need for jobs and economic stabilization are considered top priorities. With further study and evaluation on a longitudinal level, hopefully the career education unit will demonstrate its value and the necessity of its inclusion in all curriculum on a regular basis. Drop-out rates in depressed areas are common and with the aid of career education, hopefully they will decrease.

Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Sex: M F Race_____Birthday ----------

Please answer the following questions with YES or NO.

1.	I feel good most of the time.	Yes	No
2.	I have goals for my future.	Yes	No
3.	I like school.	Yes	No
4.	I worry about my future	Yes	No
5.	I feel tired and have no energy.	Yes	No
6.	I miss a lot of school.	Yes	No
7.	I know what job I want when I graduate from high school.	Yes	No
8.	I plan to go to college?	Yes	No
9.	I do have many friends.	Yes	No
10.	I want a good job when I graduate.	Yes	No
11.	I plan to graduate from high school.	Yes	No
12.	I want to learn about jobs I could do when I graduate.	Yes	No
13.	I feel sad.	Yes	No
14.	I worry about my future.	Yes	No
15.	I like my life the way it is.	Yes	No
16.	I get along with my friends.	Yes	No
17.	I worry about money.	Yes	No

18.	Making a decision about my career is very important.	Yes	No
19.	I get along with authorities.	Yes	No
20.	My life is everything I want it to be.	Yes	No
21.	Have you decided on how much money you expect to earn on your <u>first</u> fulltime job?	Yes	No
22.	Do you have "set" goals for your life?	Yes	No
23.	I expect to change jobs several times.	Yes	No
24.	I will relocate if the job demands it.	Yes	No
25.	I know I can live well on minimum wages.	Yes	No
26.	I deserve a government check every month.	Yes	No
27.	I plan to live all of my life in Kemper County.	Yes	No
28.	I like where I live.	Yes	NO

Table 1

F Values of Questions in Questionnaire

Question	F Ratio	F Probability
1	.9062	.3432
2	1.7407	.1897
3	5.6559	.0191*
4	1.0590	.3057
5	1.4414	.2324
6	8.5043	.0043*
7	.0177	.8945
8	.0823	.7747
9	1.8677	.1873
10	3.9274	.0500*
11	1.0357	.3110
12	.2380	.6266
13	3.6566	.0584
14	.4789	.4903
15	2.6380	.1071
16	1.5725	.2124
17	3.93347	.0497*
18	1.0422	.3095
19	4.7910	.0307*

*$p<.05$.

Table 1 cont.

F Values of Questions on Questionnaire

Question	F Ratio	F Probability
20	.1709	.6801
21	.9411	.3341
22	.4891	.4858
23	3.1495	.0787
24	1.2044	.2748
25	4.4031	.0381*
26	.0644	.8002
27	3.1539	.0785
28	7.1223	.0087*

*$p<.05$

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